

24th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Senator Jim Hargrove

1998 LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP



Spring 1998

Dear Friends,

Many have called 1998 a "do nothing" legislative session. And in some respect, I agree. Fish got more attention than working families. Economic development, for the most part, was put on the back burner to simmer for another year. And hundreds of bills, several of which infringed on personal freedom, were cranked out at a frantic pace. One of these, which I voted against, will require every citizen to put his/her Social Security number on state licenses applications — a huge invasion of privacy and attack on civil liberties in my book. In the end, I think this law will also hurt the sales of fishing and hunting licenses, which could mean an even bigger debt for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

While adjustments to the \$19.1 billion budget included a little bit more money for schools, public safety, salmon recovery, and social services, the Legislature failed to take advantage of investment opportunities for children's health care, long-term care for the elderly, class-size reductions in schools, school levy equalization, financial aid for college, and child care assistance.

Of course, some good things did get attention, including consumer rights under energy deregulation, tougher drunk driving laws, and tighter guidelines surrounding mentally-ill offenders. Details on these, and other bills I supported during the session, are highlighted in this report.

Please feel free to contact me about these or other issues that concern you. My district office phone number in Hoquiam is (360) 533-9477. I also encourage you to write and mail in your comments and concerns on the attached card.

Sincerely,

Jim Hargrove
State Senator, 24th District

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SMALL VICTORY FOR DISTRESSED COUNTIES

A major disappointment was the Legislature's failure to pass the Governor's rural economic development package. The bill, supported by me and other members of the Coastal Caucus, would have added money for marketing rural sites, building infrastructure, and bigger tax incentives for companies to locate or expand in Washington's 22 distressed counties.

In the last few hours of the 1998 session, however, I was able to get a major tax break for software companies that locate in any of the distressed counties. The proposal, which is now on its way to the Governor's desk, gives software companies total exemption from business and occupation taxes for three years, and the equivalent of a low .138 percent tax rate thereafter, if they locate in a distressed county.

The hope is that some of the smaller computer companies that create customized and canned software will start looking to locate in distressed areas. Typically, these types of businesses don't need a whole lot of infrastructure to support them, so there isn't as much red tape or many big sewer and water issues to overcome. It's also a clean industry that pays very well. It may not attract Microsoft, but it's a step in narrowing the economic gap between rural and urban Washington.



1998 LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP

DRUNK DRIVING

Last year, more than 17,000 people in the United States were killed — and one million more injured — in alcohol-related accidents. Accidents in Washington accounted for more than 350 of those deaths.

In an effort to reduce these numbers, the Legislature passed a package of bills this session aimed to crack down on drunk drivers. While I supported many of these bills, I spoke against one section that would have punished the spouse and family of drunk drivers by taking away their car. While I am all for making our streets safe, it is not fair to take away property if it hurts someone who did not commit a crime. Plain and simple.

Fortunately, we were able to keep the vehicle forfeiture section out of the final drunk driving legislation. The new laws also will lower the legal blood-alcohol limit from .10 percent down to .08 percent, and allow police to suspend the license of a suspected drunk driver automatically upon arrest.

FAMILIES FIRST

For many working (or out-of-work) families, the current focus on saving the salmon may bring back nightmares of government regulations and the spotted owl. In that case, the Endangered Species Act didn't give much consideration to families in our district. That's why I introduced legislation this session that questions the effect that government regulations are having on families.

This bill, which got as far as the House, would have required state agencies and local governments to assess each proposed ordinance, resolution, or administrative rule to determine its effect on families. Other states, including California, Connecticut, Indiana, and Virginia, have introduced family-impact legislation, and the governors' offices in New York and Colorado have implemented similar laws.

I am hopeful this bill will at least generate discussion of how governmental actions affect families so that we won't have to pay for the problem after the fact.

MENTALLY-ILL OFFENDERS

As the ranking Democratic member the Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee, I hear a lot of horror stories about what happens when a system that is supposed to protect the public and punish offenders fails.

The case of retired firefighter Stanley Stevenson, who was stabbed to death last year while leaving a Seattle Mariners game, was a tragedy that didn't have to happen. The man arrested, Dan Van Ho, is a transient with a history of violent behavior and petty crime. He had been released just days earlier from the King County Jail despite a recommendation that he be held because of mental illness and his violent tendencies.

In an effort to improve the system, the Legislature passed a bill to give judges more authority to confine mentally-ill

offenders for treatment, with more weight given to an offender's behavioral history and likelihood of hurting someone. The bill also would require workers in the mental-health industry, psychiatric staff, state mental hospitals, lawyers, and the courts to share more information with each other. Hopefully it will increase attention in the criminal justice system on mentally-ill offenders who need treatment and may be a threat to society.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The good part of the \$2.4 billion transportation plan proposed by the Legislature is that it doesn't include a gas tax. It does include about \$600,000 for infrastructure for Grays Harbor County, part of \$10 million per year earmarked for economically distressed counties.

The bad part is that in paying back \$1.9 billion in bonds for the plan over 25 years, we would essentially be paying *twice* for all the projects due to interest. The other catch is that the money to pay back the bonds would come from the motor vehicle excise tax (car tabs), which now goes into the state's general fund to pay for schools and other state programs.

In light of an uncertain economic future, this much borrowing may be a risky way to fund the 177 designated projects.

This issue will be on the ballot in November.

ENERGY DEREGULATION

Washington's consumer-owned and investor-owned electric utilities have for years offered consumers a high degree of reliability and service quality while providing the lowest rates in the country.

Unfortunately, there are some high-cost states and private energy marketers that want to take our cheap power away from us. In an effort to protect Washington consumers first, I supported legislation this session that would require utilities and power marketers to develop consumer-protection policies before deregulation ever could occur. The bill also directs the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission to identify the potential negative effects of deregulation and make recommendations for how to prevent them.

For example, a recent federal Department of Energy analysis showed that rates here would increase by as much as 25 percent under deregulation. That's about \$200 per household each year. And a 1997 issue of *Consumer Reports* noted that, "Under the deregulation plans approved to date, consumers can anticipate the kind of service offers they've come to be familiar with under long-distance phone deregulation — confusing pricing schemes and high-pressure sales tactics."

As deregulations inches forward, I will continue to work to ensure that Washington's citizens determine what kind of energy regulation structure works best for them.



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NATURAL RESOURCES & SALMON

While most people would agree that our state's natural areas and fragile ecosystems should be protected, there has been a lot of concern in the last few years over the lack of public involvement and management of our state's Natural Area Preserves (NAPs).

Lately, people have not been happy about the way the Department of Natural Resources is keeping them out of the public process — and off the land.

To help address this issue and look for solutions, I introduced a bill this session that would put a one-year moratorium on any new management plans in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties before January 10, 1999. The bill would also call for a study to examine the boundary impacts of NAPs, the level of public input, criteria used to ensure that NAPs meet the purpose of the program, and possible integration of NAPs with the less restrictive Natural Resources Conservation Area program, allowing for low-impact hunting opportunities and limited public use.

I appreciate the time and effort of those citizens who drove to Olympia to testify for this bill. Hopefully we will now see some results — and action — from the Department of Natural Resources on this issue.

In another big natural resource issue, we made a first step in salmon recovery, giving more power to local communities to create their own water-use plans, including habitat restoration. With the pending salmon species listings under the federal Endangered Species Act, this plan will help us stay in control of our own natural resources, fund local salmon recovery projects, and track the progress of those efforts.



CITIZEN RESPONSE

What do you think???

*Please cut out this panel and return it to Senator Hargrove with your comments. **Don't forget the stamp!***

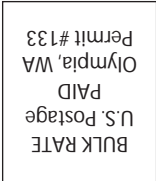
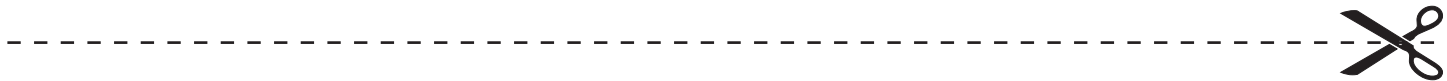
Dear Senator Hargrove,

Please include your name, address and phone number so that we may respond to your comments:

Name

Address

Phone



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